



# HEARD ACROSS MONTANA

An electronic newsletter in support of public safety services in Montana  
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## IM Weekly Highlights



- IM members are reminded to submit their requests for narrowband repeaters and base-stations by Sunday, Feb 27, at 5:00 pm.
- IM Technical Committee (IMTC) Chair, Kerry O'Connell, distributed written copies of IMTC sub-committee reports in advance of Monday's meeting to provide additional time on the agenda for reviewing narrowband equipment applications.

## PSSB Weekly Highlights

- PSSB representatives Wing Spooner and Julia Noland, IM Executive Director Kevin Bruski, and dozens of local and state representatives attended the Homeland Security Grant Sub-Recipient Workshop in Helena on Feb. 23. (See related article)

## COML Training Coming in June

By E. Wing Spooner [espooner@mt.gov](mailto:espooner@mt.gov)

Save the date for the three-day Communications Unit Leader (COML) training that is coming to Montana starting Tues., June 28. This session, sponsored by the Office of Emergency Communications (OEC), trains participants on how to coordinate on-scene emergency communications during a multi-jurisdictional response. For more information on course objectives, please visit: <http://www.safecomprogram.gov/SAFEOM/currentprojects/comltraining/>.

Several pre-requisites must be met before taking the course, including completion of Incident Command System (ICS) courses 100, 200 and 300 as well as Independent Study (IS) courses 700 and 800b. For more information on how to complete these courses online, click on this link: <http://training.fema.gov/IS/>.

In addition, participants must have a public safety communications background with exposure to field operations; skills in basic public safety communications technology, supervisory, and/or personnel management; knowledge of local communications and communications systems, frequencies and spectrum, technologies, system site locations, and communications and resource contacts; and knowledge of local, regional, and state communication plans.

We urge you to begin preparations to complete pre-requisite courses if you are interested in attending this three-day training program on June 28. HAM readers will be kept informed when more details are available about times and locations.

## Narrowbanding Tops State Radio User Discussion

By Scott Bradford [sbradford@mt.gov](mailto:sbradford@mt.gov)

Narrowbanding continues to be a priority of discussion for the State Radio Users group, as demonstrated during its recent Feb. 22 meeting. Because of the extensive use of VHF voice communication and UHF links by State of Montana agencies, the Jan. 2013 requirement for narrowbanding is a concern. In 2010, State Radio Users group members were asked to evaluate their agency needs for replacement portable and mobile radios, along with conventional repeaters and base stations, to help prepare a strategy for funding and obtaining these resources. The estimated total cost for compliance was more than \$2,730,000. Recent budget cuts and funding limitations pose concerns for moving forward on meeting this federal mandate.

Most state agencies reported that progress is being made for narrowband radio replacements, with the Montana Highway Patrol and the Depts. of Transportation and Livestock indicating they will meet the FCC deadline. A few base stations and remote repeaters are still needed. Several replacements could possibly be made with the \$70,000 available to state agencies via 2010 DHS funding designated for this purpose. Several members suggested pooling the request and establishing a priority list to keep from competing with each other for this or future grant resources. The group decided that its March meeting would be dedicated to establishing narrowbanding priorities among state agencies.

Questions about the status of the Interoperability Montana Project were expressed, and PSSB Bureau Chief Carl Hotvedt reported on the status of HS03, the interoperable interim study, which was not passed by the legislature. The study is not necessary to target legislative funding in 2013, but would have improved that effort. Short-term funding efforts are going surprisingly well among counties, tribes and state and federal agencies, but hurdles still exist to keep this effort going beyond July of this year. The group discussed various issues and stressed that a significant change in IM governance is needed if the project is to survive.

The group also received updates from Mike Stapp, DES, regarding recent concerns with the BROWN common frequency and a status update of the statewide mapping initiative that DES is conducting.

The next State Radio Users Group meeting is

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scheduled for Tues., March 22, at the Old Livestock Building, 1310 E. Lockett St., in Helena.

## Homeland Security Grant Sub-Recipient Workshop

By E. Wing Spooner [espooner@mt.gov](mailto:espooner@mt.gov)

The Montana Office of Homeland Security Grants, part of Disaster and Emergency Services (DES), sponsored a training session for grant sub-recipients on Wed., Feb. 23 in Helena. Ed Tinsley, the DES Administrator, welcomed the group and gave a brief overview of OHSG history and goals.

Participants received an in-depth education on fiduciary, legal and administrative requirements of grant management presented by Bob Cates, CEO of Bob Cates & Associates, a grant management consulting firm. Bob's session was a condensed version of a three-day class he normally teaches covering pre-award, post-award, and conclusion activities of grant administration as well as how to develop policies, procedures and systems to ensure compliance with federal requirements.

Julia Fenwick, OHSG Grants Manager, explained a recent Critical Issue Survey her department conducted to coordinate and prioritize risk categories and funding priorities. The three funding priorities for this next set of Homeland Security grants are to strengthen interoperable and operable communications capability, strengthen information sharing and collaborative capabilities, and community and/or citizen's preparedness. Sub-recipients may submit up to ten projects per category. Julia also explained that after applications are scored and ranked, a portion of applications will be identified as approved, but not funded. So, if grant funds are returned for any reason, they may be quickly distributed to this pool of qualified applicants. In addition, Julia reviewed the grant application process, indicating that the application deadline is Tuesday, May 31. She also mentioned that a word limit will not be imposed on grant applications this year.

Participants were excited to see a prototype OHSG web page that will offer a variety of online services when it becomes operational. The HAM will keep you posted on its availability.

## Billings Initiates Frequency Switch

By Scott Bradford [sbradford@mt.gov](mailto:sbradford@mt.gov)

The City of Billings stands unique in Montana as the only significant public safety user not utilizing the Very High Frequency (VHF) band. Billings uses a three-site 5-channel simulcast system in the 800 MHz band with simplex tactical and interoperable channels. The 800 MHz spectrum the city is authorized to use resides in the FCC 800 MHz re-banding plan to facilitate cellular and other uses.

As part of the Frequency Reconfiguration agreement (FRA), Sprint-Nextel provided the City of Billings alternative frequencies for their simplex and interoperable systems. Both the simplex and interoperable systems are used to facilitate communications during mutual aid incidents. On Mon., Feb. 28, local radio shops will take the current simplex and interop systems down in the transition from the incumbent frequencies to the replacement frequencies. The frequency transition process is expected to be completed that same day. In preparation for the change in frequencies, all mobile and portable radios in the city system have been programmed to accommodate the new frequency assignments.

The City of Billings conducted a comprehensive assessment in July 2009 to determine a long-term direction for replacing the current system. The existing Billings system will now be supported by the manufacturer until 2013. Final decisions on a long-term solution have not been made at this time; however, re-banding the 800 MHz frequencies, along with replacement equipment and extended service options, serves as a temporary measure to continue public safety radio operations.

For more information regarding the progress of this work, or changes in the City of Billings system, contact Anne Kindness, Billings Communication Center Manager, at (406) 657-8444 or via e-mail at [KindnessA@ci.billings.mt.us](mailto:KindnessA@ci.billings.mt.us).

## Upcoming Meetings

- **Mon., Feb. 28**  
IM Technical Committee (IMTC)  
Helena • 9:00 am - 3:00 pm  
MACo Large Conf. Rm., Lower Level, 2715 Skyway Dr.
- **Wed., March 2**  
IM Contract Sub-Committee  
Helena • 9:00 am - 3:00 pm  
Rm. 160, Mitchell Bldg., 125 N. Roberts St.
- **Thurs., March 3**  
Northern Tier Interoperability Consortium (NTIC)  
Havre • 9:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Great Northern Inn, 1345 1st St.
- **Mon., March 7 (Please note date change)**  
IM Finance Committee (IMFC)  
Helena • 9:00 am - 12:00 pm  
Anderson ZurMuehlen, 828 Great Northern Blvd.
- **Mon., March 7 (Please note date change)**  
IM Governance Committee (IMGC)  
Helena • 1:00 - 5:00 pm  
Anderson ZurMuehlen, 828 Great Northern Blvd.
- **Tues., March 8 (Please note date change)**  
IM Project Directors Meeting (IMPD)  
Helena • 9:00 am - 3:00 pm  
MACo Large Conf. Rm., Lower Level, 2715 Skyway Dr.